

Testimony of Curtis Darragh IV
Connecticut School Counselor Association
in regards to

H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education

Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Curtis Darragh IV, and I am the 2021 CT school counselor of the year. [I currently am at Westside Middle School Academy in Danbury CT]. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. **Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

My Caseload started used to start off the ASCA recommended ratio of 250:1. My current caseload right now is 375:1. This has been due to the increasing enrollment in the Danbury Public Schools. Danbury's enrollment continues to rise with the high school reaching well over 3,400 students and my counterpart school counselors having similar ratios. Every single student should have access to their school counselor. With the mental health needs that are increasing in the state and across the nation, school counselors are becoming more important than ever. We are at the front lines of the students, the link to parents and the community and the trusted person in the building for a child. The pandemic has increased these mental health concerns ranging from anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, non-suicidal risk injurious behaviors and lack of social and emotional awareness of others. Our population in Danbury holds many ELL students, and with the use of translators, that doubles up the time to speak with our families about the concerns we have for their child. With a caseload of 375; my strengths are stretched thin.

School counselors cover three domains; academic, social/emotional and college and career readiness. Our work is surrounded by the success of our students in these areas. Here are some facts about school counselors:

- CT ranks 37th in the country for average counselor to student ratios
- As of 2018-2019, CT's average ratio is 1:457
- Less than 25% of our elementary schools have school counselors and often elementary school counselors are split among several schools

My fear as a school counselor is missing that one student that says they need to discuss with me and I have to tell them to wait or that I will get to them the next day because I am being pulled in multiple directions with meetings, other students in crisis; 211, DCF, and many other responsibilities that come with this job. I love my career, and this profession and the many rewards that comes with being there for the children. This school year is the toughest I have ever worked. I felt that administrators threw us into a spot in our life where it was a normal school year, "just with masks on." It's not and mental health professionals will be dealing with the effects of this for years to come. We need to be proactive and act accordingly.

I would ask that the appropriations committee consider appropriating money specifically for school counseling and the hiring of more school counselors. This is important to the future of our children in CT.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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